

Racial classification essay



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White, black, African, colored, dark, light; these are the terms used to describe people according to their physical characteristics and other biological traits. Racial classification is an old age practice that describes the stratification of human beings into groups of individuals who share a certain number of anthropological traits. Race is the subdivision of members of the human species into group that differ from each other based on the ancestral, geographic or according to the frequency of certain genetic traits.

It is usually based on a people's skin color, hair texture, facial features and eye formation. The History of Racial Classification The Chain of Being, the ancient theorem that purports there are natural categories ton a hierarchy created by God or nature, is believed to be the genesis of racial classification. The ideology of race developed in the late 17th century, in tandem with the formal establishment of slavery in Europe. It culminated in the grouping of mankind into three groups based on skin color. The three races identified were the European whites, Native Americans, and Negroes form Africa.

Later on in the mid 19th century; Asians started arriving in Europe, together with the Irish, Southerners from South America, the Caribbean and Easterners from Eastern Europe. This presented a problem with the racial classification, since they could not be fitted in either the White or black categories. It followed that Asians were assigned a class between white and black, the Irish, Eastern and Southern arrivals were first seen as a separate race lower than the Europeans but were later accepted into the white category. Later on, the definition of race started to be problematic as intermarriage led to genetic mixtures.

The United States were forced to change the definition of races such that a Black was anyone who had known African ancestors, a phenomenon that was referred to as the ‘one drop rule’ This implied that if one was born of a European and African parent, he/she was automatically black. In South Africa, racial classification began in the 1940s, but was officially included in the government policy towards 1948. This saw the inclusion of the policy into the Afrikaner Nationalist Party. In addition to the Africans and Whites, other races were identified, who included the colored, who were a people of mixed black, Malayan and white descent; and the Asians.

Here, the government had appointed a board that was charged with reviewing racial identities annually and giving appraisals, whereby one could be “promoted” to the next class, or lowered. In South America, Caribbean and South America, it was difficult to categorize people because of the mixture in the population. As a result, they opted to base their classification on the relatively varying tones of skin. If you had light skin, it meant you had white descendants somewhere down the line therefore that made you superior. Dark skin was evidence of black descendants, which meant that you were of inferior standing in the society. Role of Science The rise of the scientific approach to racial categorization began in the late 18th century, with the writings of the philosopher Voltaire, the jurist Edward Long and Dr.

Charles White. Their classifications were rife with ethnic chauvinism as they used the colonist description of race, majorly based on appearance and behavior. Terms such as, ‘savage’ and ‘primitives’ were used to classify the natives as being inferior. However, it is Linnaeus and Blumenbach who first introduced classification of the varieties of humankind that were later to be

adopted as the official names of the races of the world. Since then it has been accepted that there are about five or more races. The American president Thomas Jefferson is credited with bringing in science to affirm his beliefs about the natural inferiority of the Negro.

In his book, 'Notes on the State of Virginia' he expressed his uncertainty over his belief and called on the scientists to validate his hypothesis. Since then, science has been used to try to confirm the racial ideology by examining the bodies of the different people in each racial category. This science seeks to explain the differences in the human population in terms of their level of intelligence relative to each other. It further studies the apparent variations in education and standards of living as being determined biologically based on the differences among the groups. These studies have often been controversial, with different scientists coming up with different conclusions.

Good examples of such cases are Jensen, Hernstein, Mushton and Rowe, who after their studies on the human genes concluded that racial group variations based on premises such as IQ show genetically determined differences in groups that cannot be explained by the differences in their environmental living conditions and other physical factors. According to them, Africans and African descendants have lower IQ compared to Europeans and European descendants, who in turn are less intelligent than Asians. However, some scientists have claimed that their studies were either inconclusive, or found no substantial differences between the races. As much as these findings have been hotly contested, they have had strong influences at some times, with scientists finding new grounds upon which to

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further the racial differences ideology, especially with the advances made in sequencing the human genome. Traits associated with different Racial Groups The studies on racial differences mainly focus on the phenotype of a given group. A phenotype describes the entirety of traits an individual possesses, including the physical characteristics like eye color, shape and size of body among others.

Read also this new information to determine the parents' genotypes Some attempts have also been made in modern times to evaluate the genotypic differences between the biological races. A genotype is a cluster of a person's genetic make up that is found in one population but not in another. Studies carried out so far have shown that the differences in physical characteristics among people of different races are mainly a product environment. The human bodies are made to adapt to the environmental conditions prevailing in their habitat.

As such, people of African descent tend to have dark skin indicating high levels of melanin, which helps to protect them from the ultra violet rays of the African sun. In contrast, their European counterparts have lighter skin indicating low levels of melanin. This is because their environment is mainly temperate, so they do not require large amounts of melanin to protect them from the sun's rays. Implications of Racial Classification Racial classification has had long term and short term, often disastrous consequences. The best example of this is the capture and ferrying of Africans overseas to work as slaves.

The Europeans used the racial ideology to justify their holding of slaves, emphasizing the inferiority of the Negro. The same argument was extended to the American Indians, who were nearly exterminated by the American settlers, when they pushed them out of their ancestral lands into reserves especially prepared for them in Oklahoma. Up to date, the Native Americans like the Creeks still live in poverty and isolation from the rest of the United States. The Jewish Holocaust remains one of the worst consequences of racial classification. During the 2nd World War, the Nazis under Adolf Hitler used the ideology of racial superiority and inferiority to terminate 11million Jews and other minorities like the Gypsies, Africans, and Homosexuals, among others. The apartheid system in South Africa left lasting effects on the black people of South Africa.

The blacks were settled into isolated into reserves called Bantustans, and were not allowed to mix with the other races. They were denied proper education for a long time that even now, they are still struggling to catch up, as many cannot be employed in any high level of positions for lack of qualifications. This has also led to skewed development in the country with the black townships being poor and under developed. The racial segregation was also accompanied with brutality against the native South Africa, and the Sharpeville massacre is a case in time, of the wanton killing of the black people. In Sudan, the Darfur War, which is being fuelled by racial hatred between the Arab Africans and Black Africans, has seen the death of over 200, 000 people and displacement of hundreds of thousands of others. Even among the Europeans themselves, race is used to justify the disparities in socio-economic conditions among the people.

In many countries today, people are accorded education, health care and other social and economic services according to their race. Conclusion From the above discussion, it comes out clearly that racial differences are mainly a product of environmental, social, educational, and political circumstances. As a matter of fact, most studies have concluded that there are more differences within groups themselves than between different racial groups. Racial classification has come out as a strategy used to divide, rank and subdue people.

There is insufficient scientific proof to prove that some races are indeed superior to others. It is therefore wrong to be prejudiced against other groups of people just because they have a different physical characteristic from us.